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Daily Highlights

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Security Council condemns lack of effective measures to enable Serb refugees to return to Croatia; demands Government ensure local Serbs can exercise rights.

* UN civilian Police Monitors accompany Bosnian Federation police and IFOR troops as they enter Serbian suburb of Sarajevo; exodus of Serbs continues.

* New Prosecutor for International Criminal Tribunals for Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda appointed; Justice Richard Goldstone will stay in post until October.

* Preparations proceed for national elections in Sierra Leone.

* United Nations-sponsored negotiations between Guatemalan parties begin in Mexico City.

* Special Committee on Charter told Security Council veto should be reviewed and membership expanded.

* Winners of 1996 UN Population Award announced as drastic US funding cuts to international population programmes go into effect.

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The Security Council today condemned the fact that effective measures had not been taken so far to enable refugees from Croatia to return and called on the Croatian Government to ensure the expeditious processing of all requests from refugees. In a statement read by its President, Madeleine Albright (United States), the Council demanded that the Government take measures to ensure local Serbs can exercise their rights to remain, leave or return to their homes in safety and dignity and reclaim their property. It also called on Croatia to consider granting amnesty to local Serbs still being detained because of their alleged participation in last year's conflict.

The Council called on the Government to rescind its earlier suspension

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of articles of constitutional law affecting the rights of minorities, and establish a human rights court. It reminded Croatia that the promotion of strict respect for the rights of the Serb minority was relevant to the successful implementation of the Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium of 12 November 1995.

In its statement, the Council acknowledged that human rights violations had been greatly reduced but expressed concern at reports of isolated incidents of killings and other violations. It also acknowledged that Croatia had achieved significant progress in alleviating the humanitarian plight of the mostly elderly Serb population still living there. The Council said it looked to the Government to vigorously prosecute those suspected of past violations of humanitarian law and human rights against local Serbs. It welcomed Croatia's agreement to the establishment of a long-term mission by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor human rights throughout the country.

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Monitors from the United Nations International Police Task Force (IPTF) accompanied 30 police from the Bosnian Federation and troops from the Implementation Force (IFOR) today, as they entered Sarajevo's Serbian-suburb of Vogosca. A United Nations spokesman said about 70 out of a planned 90 UN civilian police monitors were patrolling the area. So far, there had been no incidents but the Serb exodus from the suburb was continuing and a UN helicopter had been sent to rescue a group of people trapped on a mountain outside the city.

According to United Nations estimates, between 1,500 and 2,500 Serbs were still in Vogosca and around 17,000 had already left, the spokesman said. There were also population movements out of other Serb suburbs. People had burned their own homes, as well as a school, apartment complex and supermarket and there was obviously a campaign of disinformation, she said. The Serb's fear could be stemmed if IPTF forces were deployed as quickly as possible. To date, 300 civilian police officers out of IPTF's 1,721 authorized strength were now serving in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 183 in the Sarajevo region and 158 waiting in Zagreb for deployment.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has appointed Justice Louise Arbour, a member of the Court of Appeal for Ontario, Canada, as Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. According to a United Nations spokesman, the current Prosecutor, Justice Richard Goldstone of South Africa, will stay on in his post until 1 October.

Justice Arbour was previously a trial judge for the High Court of

Justice, Supreme Court of Ontario and an Associate Professor and Associate Dean at the Osgoode Hall Law School of York University. She has taught criminal law, criminal procedure, evidence and droit civil and has published extensively on criminal law, human rights, civil liberties and gender issues. Until her appointment to the bench, Justice Arbour was Vice-President of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. She is currently on leave from the Court of Appeals and is presiding over an inquiry into problems at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario.

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A meeting between representatives of the Government of Sierra Leone and members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) will take place in Abidjan tomorrow, according to a United Nations spokesman. The meeting was particularly important because Presidential and Parliamentary elections were scheduled for Monday, she said. The Secretary-General's Special Representative, and representatives of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) will attend the meeting.

About 80 international observers will monitor the elections and the United Nations Electoral Assistance Mission, which has been in the country for some time, will also provide six people to help the electoral process.

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United Nations-sponsored talks between the Guatemalan Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) began yesterday in Mexico City, according to a UN spokesman. The current round of talks will focus on socio-economic issues.

The United Nations moderator for the Guatemalan peace talks, Jean Arnault, and the ambassadors of Colombia, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Venezuela and the United States were also attending the negotiations, the spokesman added.

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The Security Council's veto power should be reviewed and its membership expanded to reflect new demographic, political and economic realities, the representative of Indonesia told the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization this morning. He said the Council would be more representative of the UN's increased membership and assure greater transparency in decision-making. The community of nations should be based on equality, equity and transparency in representation as well as in the decision-making process.

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A leading Philippine advocate for population polices and programmes, Leticia Ramos-Shahani, and Pathfinder International, a United States-based non-governmental organization, will share the United Nations 1996 Population Award. The award is presented annually to individuals and institutions which have made outstanding contributions to increasing awareness of population problems and solutions. Each winner will receive a diploma, a gold medal and $12,500 in prize money.

For more than 30 years, Ms. Shahani, a member of the Philippine senate, has been a leader on population and its impact on social development, public health and environmental sustainability. She has spearheaded efforts in the national legislature and by the Government to address population issues and has also been active internationally, particularly in Asia. Pathfinder International, was chosen for its work for over 38 years to develop and improve family planning programmes and create awareness on population issues. Since 1957, it has pioneered many advances in family planning by investing in people and organizations that provide family planning services to those most in need. It has contributed funds to launch 29 family planning associations.

Meanwhile, new United States funding cuts will affect millions of women and children in the developing world who will have their access to family planning and contraceptive services cut off, according to Ms. Marilyn Edmunds from Pathfinder International. She told correspondents the cuts would be "fairly drastic" and population programmes funded through US-AID would spend around $200 million less this year than in 1995, with a resulting increase in maternal mortality and more abortions. There would be some 10 million more unwanted births, 3 million abortions, at least half million infant deaths and tens of thousands of maternal deaths in 1996.

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